

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Seek Ye First...

Religion was the mainstay in the lives of the early settlers along Provo Valley's Snake Creek. Nearly all of them left the security of homes and opportunities in the East and in foreign lands to cast their lots with the growing Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Through persecution and bitterness they had suffered in Missouri and Illinois, and now they were giving their lives to establish cities where they and their families could enjoy religious freedom.

Life was hard along Snake Creek, but never hard enough that the work couldn't be accomplished in six days of work a week. The Sabbath Day was reserved for worshipping, studying the Gospel and resting for the rigors of another week. Even before the first meeting house was built in the upper settlement in 1862 the people were meeting in each others' homes for worship services.

Just before the first meeting house was completed in July, 1862, Church authorities in the valley called Sidney H. Epperson to serve as Snake Creek's first presiding elder. He and his counselors, John Fausett and Samuel Thompson were sustained on June 26, 1862. These brethren also presided over the lower settlement until 1864 when David Van Wagonen was called as presiding elder there. His counselors were Andrew Hamilton and David Wood.

In 1866 because of Indian trouble the Saints of both settlements were advised to join ranks as one settlement in order to have the necessary strength for protection. A compromise location was chosen half way between the two settlements and the settlers, forted in, called the site Midway.

The first step in laying out the new settlement was the survey of the townsite. Sidney H. Epperson and John Huber carried the tape, Mark Smith and Attewell Wootton, Sr., the pegs, and within a few days Midway was laid out in ample blocks with the public square in the center.

Around the central square seventy-five primitive dirt-roofed log cabins sprang into existence, some abutting against each other while in some instances strong panels of upright posts made palisades between cabins built slightly apart, the whole forming an impregnable wall around the square. Small rear windows were to serve as portholes in case of attack. The fort was conducted under military law, having officers and picket patrols, arising and doing certain work at the call of the bugler, John Watkins.

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These noble and Godfearing people now sensed the happiness of well provided security and felt they would be able to repel any attack of the Redman. Fortunately, the fort was never attacked; and when it was time to disband after a treaty had been made with the Indians and they had gone to live on reservations, most of the people decided to remain here. The upper and lower settlements were never rebuilt. The old fort was reserved by the town as a public square where meeting houses, schools, and stores were built.

Today a beautiful monument and marker erected by the Daughters of the Pioneers marks the scene and describes in a meager way the pioneering of this beautiful valley.

Under date of February 4, 1867, David F. Van Wagonen wrote from Midway that the winter had been comparatively mild with only 20 inches of snow and the thermometer only 4 degrees below zero at sunrise January 1, 1867. The health of the people was good and the past winter had not witnessed a single drunken person, nor heard of any riotous conduct in the whole valley, mainly because there were no distilleries or liquor shops.

The first grasshoppers were seen at Midway July 27, 1867.

December 29, 1867 Joseph S. Murdock was released as Presiding Bishop of Provo Valley and Abram Hatch was sustained in his place.

May 26, 1868 the first missionary from Midway, James Wooley Fisher, was set apart for a mission to Great Britain. He returned in 1869.

March 11, 1868 Sidney H. Epperson was reappointed by Bishop Abram Hatch as Presiding Elder of Midway with David F. Van Wagoner and Ira Norton Jacob as his counselors. The former counselors John Fausett and Samuel Thompson were released.

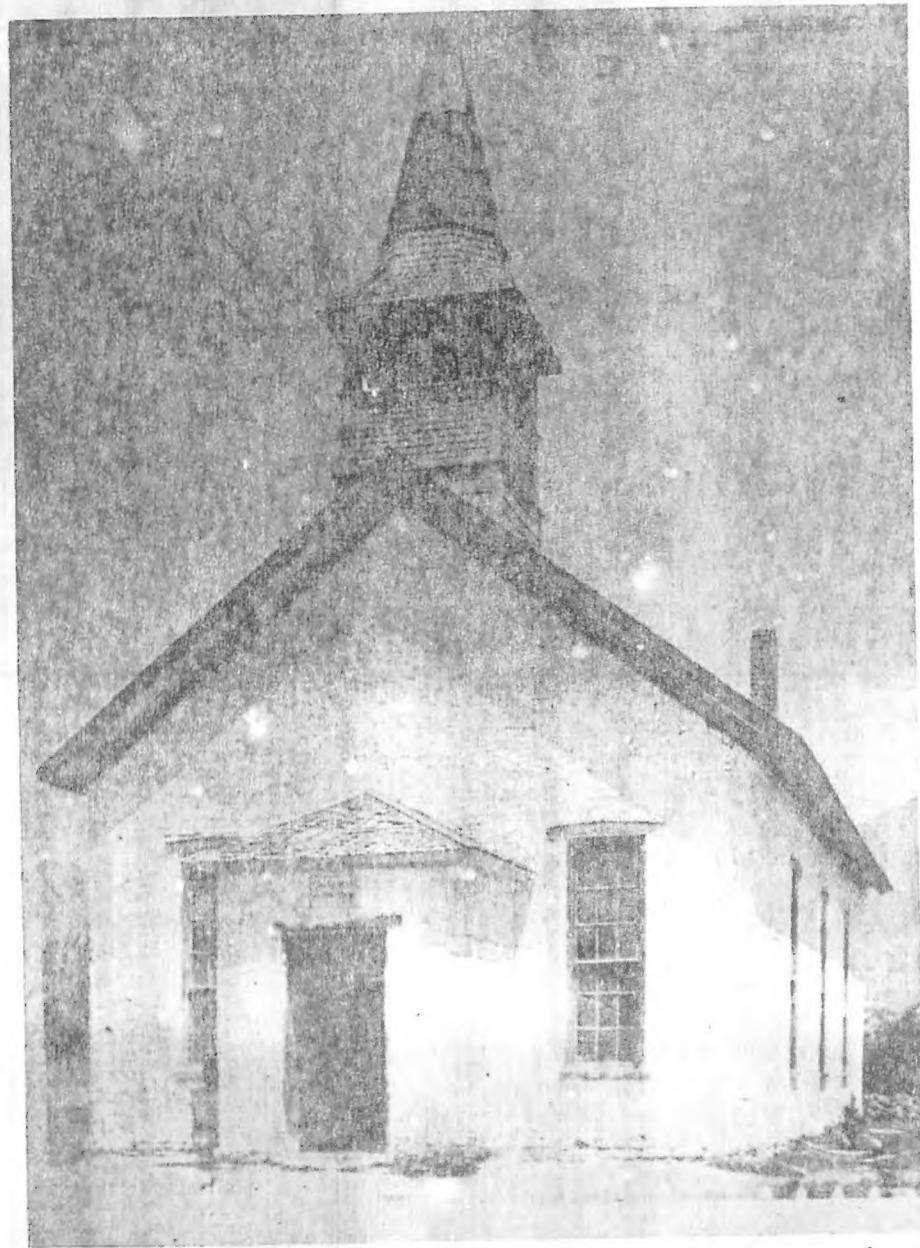
In 1868-69 a substantial rock building was erected at Midway on the southeast corner of the public square in which a good school was soon commenced. The house was built by taxation and was used for religious and other meeting purposes until 1874.

April 10, 1870 Sidney H. Epperson and counselors were released, and Henry Samuel Alexander was appointed Presiding Elder over the Midway Branch with David F. Van Wagonen and John Huber counselors.

In 1871 John Huber, the second missionary to be called from Midway, was called to the Swiss and German Mission, and Ira N. Jacob succeeded John Huber as second counselor to Henry S. Alexander. There were no further changes in the presiding officers until the organization of a ward in 1877.

In 1872 Elder George C. Lambert visited Midway, and he wrote the following interesting item which appeared in the Deseret News September 25, 1872:

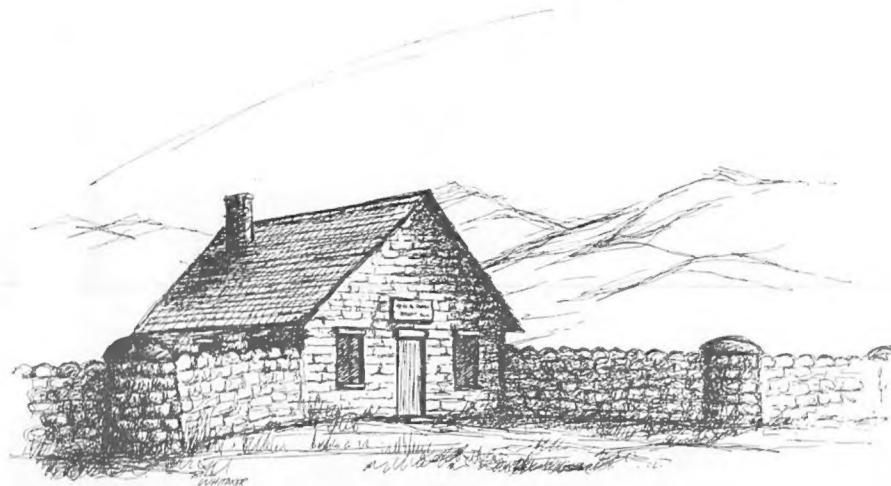
"I arrived at this interesting little town last evening and contrary



The first meeting house in Midway, dedicated in 1895. It was built of native rock and measured 30 by 60 feet.

About the same time in 1886 a new tithing office was built. It was also built of native rock and measured 24 by 32 ft. with a small belfry on the north end. It was located where Reed Kohler's residence now stands. There was a root cellar underneath the building where potatoes, vegetables, etc., paid as tithing were stored. The back part was used as a granary for grains paid in tithing. At this time much of the tithing was paid in produce.

The front room was still used for various types of meetings and as an extra class room for Sunday School and Primary. The Relief Society also met there for many years. In the back part of the lot was the tithing hay barn. It was a great problem many times for the Bishop to convert the produce into cash before spoilage took place.



The old Midway Tithing Office as depicted in a sketch by artist Bill Whitaker

1888 was a very dry year for Provo Valley. Many of the old springs dried up. On June 11 there was no water at all in the Provo River bed between Midway and Heber. Because of the drought, there was only two-thirds of a crop raised in Midway.

In January, 1893 Bishop Van Wagoner asked for a release as Bishop of Midway Ward. January 29, 1893 John Watkins was ordained Bishop by Apostle John Henry Smith and Alvah J. Alexander, 1st Counselor, Conrad Abegglen, 2nd Counselor, John Huber, ward clerk and chorister.

At the Saturday session of stake conference held January 26 the Midway Choir sang four request numbers.

On the evening of January 27, after the close of the stake conference, Apostle John Henry Smith came to Midway with President Hatch and dedicated the new meeting house.